



CHAPTER TWO

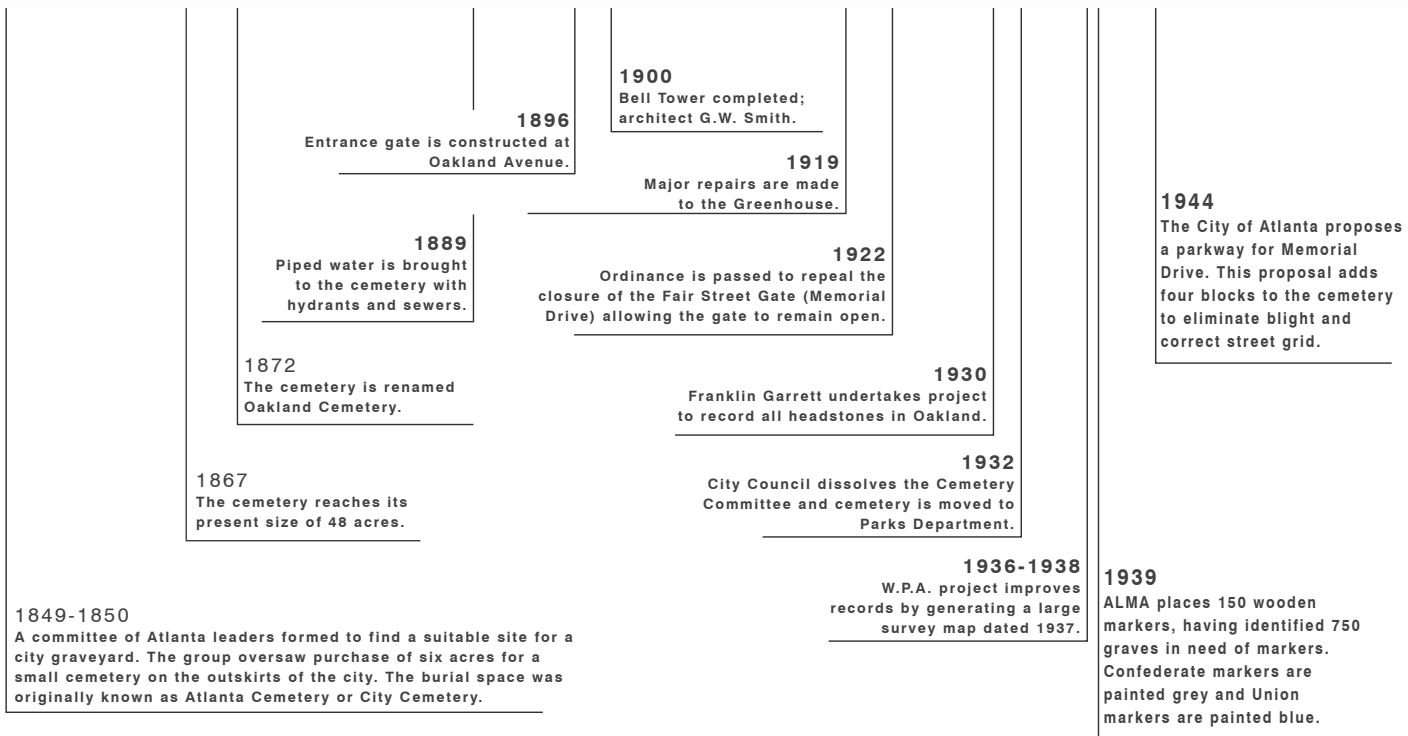
# HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT



## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT



### A Brief History of Oakland Cemetery



## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT



**1963**  
Legal segregation at Oakland ends when City Council formally ends segregation of public facilities.

**1966**  
Hunter Street Gate is repaired/rebuilt.

**1974**  
Friends of Oakland Cemetery is founded.

**1976**  
Oakland Cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**1976**  
Historic Oakland Cemetery, Inc., a non-profit "friends of Oakland" organization, is founded. It is later renamed Historic Oakland Foundation.

**1978**  
In celebration of Oakland Cemetery's 128th anniversary, the first Sunday in the Park is held.

**1982**  
Dr. Diana Williams Combs is hired as Historic Oakland Foundation's first Executive Director.

**1986**  
In partnership with the Atlanta Preservation Center, Historic Oakland Foundation begins offering weekend tours of Oakland Cemetery.

**1992**  
After ten years of effort, the chert Loop Road in the African American Section is finally paved.

**1994**  
HOCI becomes Historic Oakland Foundation.

**1997**  
Historic Oakland Foundation signs a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Atlanta.

**1997-1999**  
Restoration of Visitor Center and perimeter wall by the city.

**2006**  
First Capturing the Spirit of Oakland Halloween Tours held to great acclaim.

**2016**  
Historic Oakland Foundation begins year-long kickoff of 40th anniversary.

**2015**  
Historic Oakland Foundation opens the Beaumont Allen Greenhouse after raising funds and restoring function to Oakland Cemetery's historic greenhouse ruins.

**2011**  
3-D image aerial map of cemetery is completed.

**2008**  
On March 14, a tornado tears through downtown Atlanta and strikes Oakland Cemetery. The tornado destroys monuments, uproots over 110 trees, and litters the cemetery grounds with debris. The storm causes an estimated \$2.5 million in damages.



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### Beginnings (1849-1865)

The first era of Oakland spans from its inception to the end of the Civil War. This time period covers the development of a basic municipal cemetery in a new town finding its way through rapid growth and new management.

In 1849, The City Council tasked a committee to buy land for a new city grave yard. (The first city cemetery was located northwest of Peachtree St. and Harris St. NE.) Suitable land was found at an acceptable price in a parcel owned by A.W. Wooding. Payment for the six lots and alley was to occur in two installments with interest: the first on July 1, 1850, the second on July 1, 1851. In March 1851, the sale of wood from the new grave yard was authorized as well as construction of the first of many fences. By March 1852, the survey work for platting out the land was so bad the City could not conduct any kind of regular sale of lots. The Council's Graveyard Committee recommended the cemetery be resurveyed and re-staked as soon as possible by a qualified surveyor. It was at this time that the eastern end of the



*Memorial Drive gate from a 1909 postcard.*

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cemetery was designated for the black population (later called “Slave Square”), and a public burying place to accommodate indigent burials, later simply called “Public Ground”.

The late 1850s saw a decline in care of the cemetery while its maintenance needs rose. By 1857, more land was needed. 4.3 acres was purchased from J.F. Seavey, extending the cemetery to the east encompassing part of the Confederate Memorial Grounds and the Bobby Jones area. The same year, the first ordinance for the protection of the stonework, trees, and shrubs of the cemetery was passed in response to safety concerns. Fence repair was in order and citizens were not paying for the care of their lots. By 1859, the Mayor called for better maintenance of the grounds to improve its appearance, to provide upkeep of sunken graves, and to address the growing vandalism problem.

On the eve of war in 1860, the Hebrew Benevolent Society (later Congregation) petitioned and received the donation of six lots (the “Old Jewish Section”). In the same year, burials from the original cemetery on Peachtree Street were

relocated to the Public Ground near the front gate. During the war, the City tried to buy more land for the burial of soldiers, with the Confederate States to pay the expense.

### Improvements (1865-1910)

The fifteen to twenty years after the Civil War saw the creation of Oakland’s initial form which is how it is now experienced. Immediately after the war, the City anticipated the need for more municipal burial space. In 1866, parcels were purchased from Louis Scofield, Col. L.P. Grant and Mrs. Salina Bolin, bringing Oakland to its present configuration. This land was referred to as the “new” cemetery well into the 1870s, while the Wooding and Seavey parcels were simply called the “old” cemetery.

Surveying the new cemetery commenced in 1867; the Chairman of the Committee on Cemetery declared “that the City Surveyor deserved the assistance of a landscape gardener in laying out the walks in the new cemetery.” Alphonse Lambert, Atlanta’s leading landscape gardener, designed the winding walks to echo the rural



*An 1890s photograph of the O'Keefe family plot.*

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landscape aesthetic. The blocks were divided into four classes by size of block and width of walkway, from \$50 for the largest to \$10 for freedmen. The low, swampy area by the creek at the east end of the property became the “pauper grounds.” It wasn’t until the late 1870s, however, that the far



Oakland's original six acres depicted on this 1853 subdivision map of Atlanta.

eastern end of the cemetery was fully opened and surveyed. Also at the end of the 1860s, the (Atlanta) Ladies Memorial Association gathered the war dead for burial with wood headboards in the (Confederate) Memorial Grounds.

With such a large expansion came the need for some form of record keeping. Until 1869, lot sales were regarded simply as deed transactions and accounted for as any other land sale. This means that no actual interment record was maintained, only entries in the deed books. In the 1868 rules for the care and management of the cemetery, no mention is made of formal record keeping. Finally in 1869, realizing the complexity of the new section-block-lot system and the resulting number of new lot sales, the City Council directed staff to compile and maintain lists of lot sales and owners' names.

Attention then turned to beautification which continued through the 1870s and 1880s. In 1870, the Ladies Memorial Association began beautifying the (Confederate) Memorial Grounds with a hedge and evergreens. In 1872 the grave

yard finally received its proper name “Oakland,” for the roughly forty mature oak trees in the oldest section. In 1873, a new hot house or greenhouse was constructed and a new fence was built on three sides of the cemetery. With more beautification came calls for patrolmen to protect the shrubs and flowers. The obelisk dedicated to “Our Confederate Dead” was constructed and unveiled with great ceremony in 1874. The following year, numerous hedges were planted along the main drive, principle walks, and public ground; and trees, shrubs and hedges were neatly trimmed. The Ladies similarly beautified the Confederate Grounds, taking great care to expand the rose collection with new varieties in the fall.

To create the “rural cemetery” aesthetic, not only were hedges planted, but unsightly brick and wood enclosures and “tumbled down brick tombs” in the Old Cemetery were removed in 1876 and 1877. Only one such brick barrel vault remains in this area. After two years of clearing old, dilapidated wood and brick structures in the Old Cemetery and rotted wood headboards, the cemetery looked very different than in its



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early days. This new Oakland, with its flowers, shrubbery, evergreen hedges, and trees, served as a defacto city park until Grant Park opened in 1883; it gave residents a pleasant place to stroll, although visitors plucking flowers remained a constant source of friction.

The re-envisioning of Oakland from a stodgy old City grave yard to a modern rural cemetery overlapped with the recordkeeping issue. Less affluent residents relied on wood headboards to mark their beloved; the wood deteriorated and was lost in roughly ten to fifteen years.

As no records of interment locations were kept prior to 1870 and undertakers came and buried as they saw fit without notifying the sexton, interment records were always problematic. By 1874, the old survey map was defaced and worn, and by 1875 the registry book was completely filled. Erasures and interline actions made it almost illegible. The registry ledger was transcribed in 1876, but a new map was still needed in 1879. In 1880, staff needed to transcribe all deeds into a new book. By 1882, as wood headboards rotted away, finding older interments marked with wood headboards was a major issue.



An 1868 map showing Oakland's expansion to Boulevard and north to the railroad.

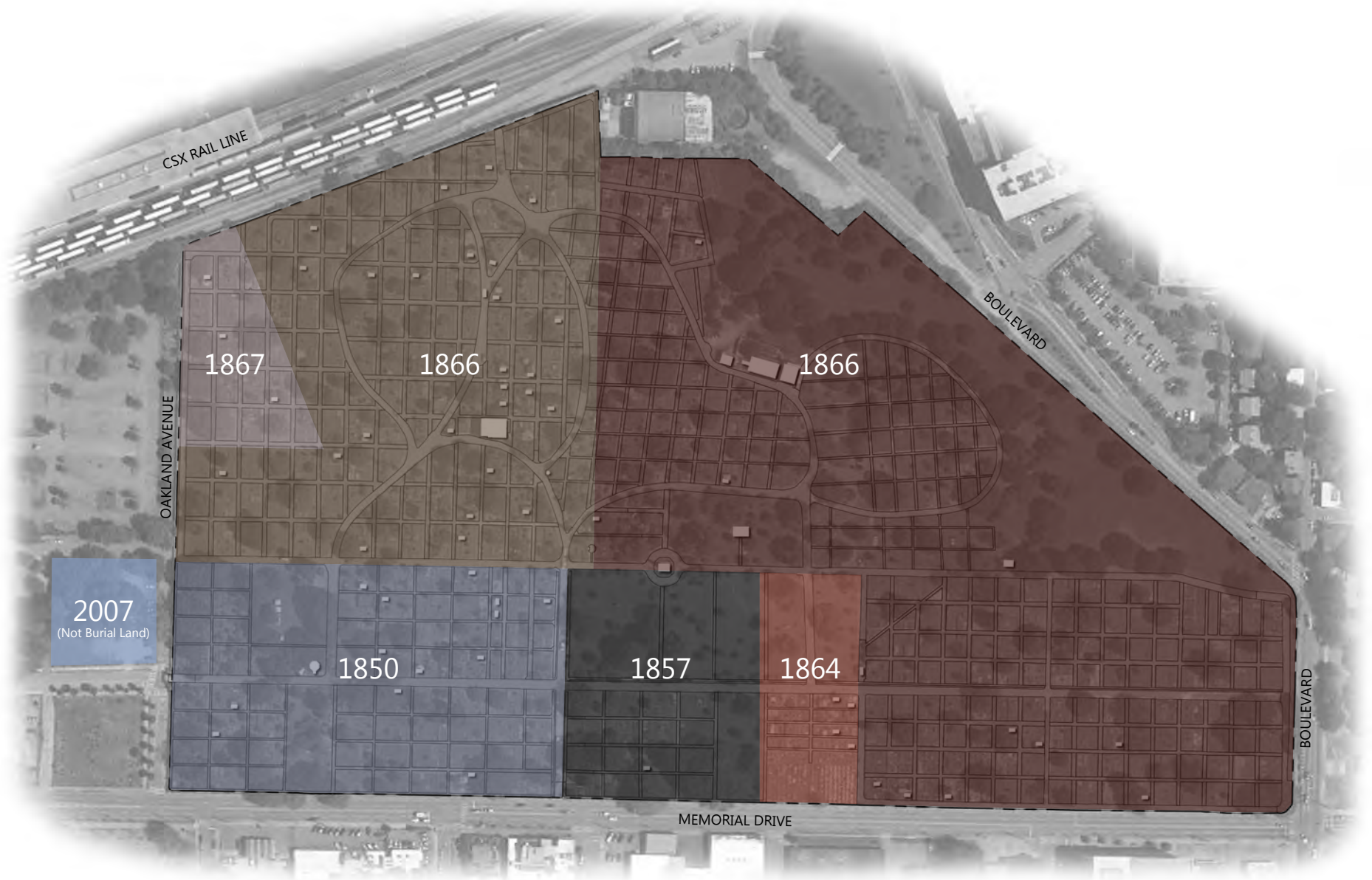
Without adequate record keeping the staff relied on markers, and when the wood headboards disintegrated, efforts to find interments were stymied. It wasn't until 1893 that a new record keeping system was put in place that included location information and tracking index.

Expansion needs surfaced again in the late 1870s.

The need for space was temporarily alleviated in April 1877 when the African American burials in "Slave Square" were moved to the "pauper grounds;" those interments with wood headboards were to be buried individually. The same year land was returned to the City by the Ladies Memorial Association. Through the 1920s, Oakland staff repeatedly needed to both open small areas of land along its eastern edges and relocate pauper burials. This was necessary to meet the demand for more paying burials and generate revenue.

In 1878, the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation bought a new Jewish burial area, today known as "Jewish Hill". The Congregation purchased land again in 1895, but from the Ladies Memorial Association ("Jewish Flats"). They later sold a quarter section to Ahavath Achim, and the Kadish Lodge acquired their portion in 1896.

By the early 1880s, Oakland was essentially out of room. The sale of lots was discontinued in 1884. The private cemetery Westview opened with the agreement it would accept the city's pauper



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burials rather than Oakland.

Unfortunately, as soon as pauper interments ceased, so did maintenance of the Pauper Grounds. Every so often, the thick underbrush was cleared by the cemetery staff (1891 and 1897). The neglect of the area lasted until 1907 when the overgrowth and trash dumping became major issues for the city. Trees were cut, grass sown, and trash hauled off. Interestingly, at this time the African American families began improving their lots. In 1909, one wrote, “A great deal of work has been done in the colored part of the Cemetery, new Drives have been laid with Cinders, Chert and Crushed Stone, thus making it possible to cover these grounds in bad weather ... much more work is needed in this...” A reporter visiting these grounds in this period noted the wood headboards, in contrast to the granite and marble memorials up the hill. It is unclear at this point when the last wood headboards rotted away.

The late 1880s saw a rise in infrastructure improvements. A rock wall was begun in 1887 beginning along Fair Street (Memorial Drive), and the Dead House was put into good condition.



*Oakland's Confederate section in the 1890s.*

In 1889, water was brought in, supplying drinking fountains and irrigation, and sewer pipes were laid to prevent washout of the roads. A little wood summer house was erected near the Confederate Monument “with seats for comfort of visitors and protection during rain-storms.”

Improving the main drives began in 1893. Sadly, many of the hedges and shrubbery for which Oakland was known died in the cold spring of 1894, so these lots were then terraced and sodded.

Bricking the walkways began in 1895; a new hothouse was built in 1895. The brick wall along Memorial Drive was completed by 1896 and capped by an iron fence. The Hunter Street gate was built, and due to road work, new retaining walls and steps were constructed. The work by the city inspired numerous lot owners to follow suit, installing retaining walls around their lots which heretofore were simply banked soil. Hundreds of trees, including many oaks, were planted from 1896 to 1898. In 1899, the new sexton's office was begun (completed in 1900), and a new gate on

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Boulevard was built for the convenience of funeral processions coming from the east. Throughout the early 1900s, infrastructure improvements continued, laying more water lines, brick gutters, and brick walks.

The Atlanta Ladies Memorial Association (ALMA: “Atlanta” was added to the organization’s name in the early twentieth century) began work in earnest in the late 1880s with the marble replacement of the rotted wood headboards and a major landscape beautification project. They began selling lots for burials to raise funds (“Ladies Memorial”) for the headstones and other projects. The shafts bearing the names of the unknown dead were erected in 1892 and partly funded by the sale of land to the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation. The Lion of Atlanta (a sculpture dedicated to the Confederacy) was erected in 1894; and through the early 1900s ALMA maintained and beautified the area. The Association’s last major expenditure was in 1913, with the installation of the granite curbing still

seen encompassing the Memorial Grounds.

The year 1907 is of note for Oakland. The position of sexton was abolished and replaced by a Superintendent and a Registrar. The City Cemetery Commission was established (it lasted until 1922). The lengthy “Rules and Regulations” for Oakland were issued, and the disgraceful condition of Paupers Grounds was addressed. Although a records system was implemented in 1893, it apparently did not extend to pauper burials. By 1907, the sexton had no record of interments for Paupers Grounds because the only guide to past years’ were rotted away wood headboards. This left the sexton with no idea of the number of interments, their locations or any names. In 1909 and 1910, a concerted effort was made to account for 4,499 unmarked and unrecorded burials. Staff produced an atlas in 1911, “showing each lot, of sufficient size to enable us to make a diagram of each grave on said lot and insert the name of the party interred together with the date of death.”

1907 to 1908 saw a fracas between the city and lot owners over denying owners the ability to build retaining walls around their lots. The city quickly relented, and ran a contract for wall construction in 1908. At that point, 325 lots were under the care of three private firms.

Construction continued with the Watch House (now known as the Guardhouse) and the two public comfort stations were completed. Tensions over the Boulevard Gate were already in evidence; citizens’ efforts to close it were unsuccessful. The city passed an ordinance mandating it remain half open. The stables were built in 1909 after the pauper burials were relocated. In 1910, the brick coal house and storage room were built. Tile

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walks were laid from Fair Street entrance to the Memorial Grounds.

### Decline (1910-1976)

By 1910, repair work to walks and leaning monuments and headstones was urgently needed. By 1912, city crews were looking after 1,600 lots belonging to non-residents and families unable to care for them. In 1915, a petition signed by 111 residents of Ward Three was sufficient to bring about the closure of the Boulevard Gate.

By the late 1910s, city funds were drying up, and a general malaise of neglect set in. In 1917, one visitor wrote to complain of the uncut grass being as tall as the rose bushes. In 1920, ALMA allowed the sexton to remove the iron fencing in the Confederate Memorial Grounds. Through the Depression into the first years of World War II, the Ladies would occasionally plant flowers or ornamental trees such as deodar cedars and dogwoods.

During the Depression, Oakland benefited from a W.P.A. project to improve the maps and records of the cemetery. From 1937 to early 1939, project staff created a new map of the entire cemetery, plus 70 sectional maps in four volumes, deed books, alphabetical interment books, abstracts and chronological volumes. In addition, project staff located over 1,000 additional Confederate soldiers on which ALMA placed temporary markers while awaiting new markers from the federal government.

After World War II, Oakland received brief city attention with a plan to expand the cemetery to the west, as part of a slum clearance/revitalization effort which never came to fruition. The Hunter Street/main gate was rebuilt in 1966, but the cemetery saw no organized support until the formation of its first friends group in 1974. Friends of Oakland Cemetery coincided with the with the appointment of Sexton Ed Waters in 1975. Thus dawned the resurrection of Oakland Cemetery as one of Atlanta's cherished places.

### Restoration (1976-Present Day)

The mid-1970s saw a renewed effort to restore Oakland Cemetery and make it a more attractive, safe destination. The precursor of the Historic Oakland Foundation (HOF), the Friends of Oakland Cemetery was a catalyst. Two years later the group's name was formally changed to Historic Oakland Cemetery, Inc.

Concurrent to this effort was a renewed interest by the city to improve the grounds. Volunteers began cleaning up the grounds, a state law was passed to enable reclamations of abandoned graves for resale, and the first of multiple restoration/master plans were developed. In 1981, the first master plan procedures began and three years later Edward Daugherty completed it. Work began immediately to implement the plan which was funded by a variety of community organizations and the City of Atlanta. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, vandalism was rampant in the cemetery, often slowing down restoration efforts. In 1994, the support group was renamed Historic Oakland Foundation. In the late 1980s



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and early 1990s HOF and the city addressed the reconstructed exterior perimeter wall and erosion problems in various parts of the cemetery. The current wall was completed in 1999. Around this time, restoration of the Bell Tower also took place. These initiatives have led to the infrastructure that exists today.

As the organization matured and restoration efforts accelerated, the foundation was able to raise more money. By the late 1990s and early 2000s it was evident that irrigation was a major issue. Initial work began to update all the water lines in the cemetery, but was never completed. In 2003, HOF received \$300,000 for restoration work in what is now known as Phase One. This led to Phases Two and Three of restoration. By 2006 a master plan committee was formed to update the 1984 plan. Robert and Company completed the plan two years later in April 2008, just two months after the March tornado caused 2.5 million dollars in damage.

Oakland recovered from the tornado and implemented a National Park Service grant to

restore 33 of the 65 mausoleums on site. This was a major success for the cemetery and inspired future efforts. Over the last several years HOF has increased staff and expanded landscape maintenance and hardscape restoration efforts. It has exposed more visitors to Oakland's beauty through its tours and special events. In the last few years, Memorial Drive has attracted a variety of developers for new office and residential growth. This has led HOF to continue its commitment to engage its neighbors. The planned redevelopment of the MARTA parking lot at the King Memorial Station and the continued expansion of the Capitol Greenway are important new realities that might impact Oakland.